

The Senate's Hawks

They're for Military Might, but Fret Over Overcommitment

By ARLEN J. LARGE

WASHINGTON—Battle plans for the Vietnam war:

Take a battleship out of mothballs, sail it up to Haiphong harbor and blast the North Vietnamese with an old-fashioned cannonade.

To reduce casualties from land mines on jungle trails, "Get a lot of old cows and horses and mules and drive them ahead of our people out there."

Classified war secrets filched from a Pentagon safe? No. These tactical suggestions emanate publicly, repeatedly from an ex-sailor of World War I, Chairman Richard Russell of the Senate Armed Services Committee. So far the Pentagon brass that have shown little professional interest in such notions (Where, asked one, would you find 3,000 battleship sailors these days?). Sen. Russell contents himself with knowing that the Army is using more dogs to sniff out the enemy, another idea he's promoted.

Yet it really doesn't matter that the 68-year-old Georgia Democrat's notions about day-to-day tactics are mainly ignored. For Mr. Russell and the senior members of his Armed Services Committee render much more valuable service to President Johnson and the Pentagon on the central foreign policy question of fighting the war at all.

In the Senate's Vietnam debates, William Fulbright's coterie of doves on the Foreign Relations Committee have received most of the press and television attention, simply because they clash dramatically with the President. As a group Sen. Russell's Armed Services militants are lesser known, but they constitute the hard core of Mr. Johnson's support—eager to provide even more weapons money than the Administration wants, quick to confront the doves with the threat of a crushing majority vote on almost any topic related to "national security."

The Armed Services panel actually seems to shun publicity. It acts mainly behind closed doors, in an antique meeting room that has almost no space for an audience. Top-ranking Armed Services members tend to stay away from the Senate floor unless one of their own bills is pending.

Protecting the Flank

Nevertheless, Mr. Russell and his martial colleagues have effectively protected the Administration's flank in Congress with each stage of the war's escalation. In part this has been accomplished by taking advanced hawkish positions that allow the President to appear moderate and cautious by contrast; in

finally bombing the Hanoi-Haiphong oil dumps, LBJ was only doing what important members of the Senate power structure had urged all along.

Politically these Senators would seem to have little in common; some are better known for activities outside the realm of national security. For years, the tall, bald, unbending Sen. Russell has been the leader of Southern conservatives in fights against civil rights legislation. Sen. John Stennis, a grandfatherly Mississippian who's the No. 2 Democrat on Armed Services, currently is in the news as head of the Special Ethics Committee investigating the activities of Sen. Thomas Dodd.

The militarist group includes two erstwhile Presidential candidates, Democrat Stuart Symington of Missouri, a domestic liberal, and Republican Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, a super-conservative on nearly everything. There's liberal Democrat Henry Jackson of Washington, "the Senator from Boeing," who insists his specialty is nuclear weapons, not aircraft. When aristocratic Leverett Saltonstall retires this year after 22 years in the Senate, his place as No. 1 Republican on Armed Services will be taken by Margaret Chase Smith, the snowy-haired lady Senator from Maine.

"I think national security is basic," says Sen. Smith, and that's the common thread that links her ideologically diverse assortment of Armed Services colleagues. They relish America's role as the world's No. 1 military power, responding sympathetically to almost every Presidential application of armed might during two decades of cold war. Lyndon Johnson himself is an alumnus of this group, having risen to a high-seniority slot on Armed Services before becoming Vice President.

Just lately, however, the military-minded Senators have taken up an argument that parallels the frettings of Mr. Fulbright's diplomacy-oriented Foreign Relations Committee. More and more, they're warning that treaties and diplomatic pledges around the world may commit this country beyond its military power to back them up.

A chief worrier about overcommitment is Sen. Stennis, chairman of the Armed Services Preparedness subcommittee. He's set his staff to work on the question in preparation for public hearings, perhaps before this session ends.

"If the hearings show how thin we are militarily, it could have some influence in pulling back our commitments," says Sen. Stennis, seated in his parlor-like office decorated with models of



RUSSELL



STENNIS